

[0001] The present invention relates to a device for metering bulk material comprising a metering unit, a stirring apparatus and a drive unit according to the preamble of claim 1.

[0002] Devices for metering bulk materials belong to the general prior art and are known in many embodiments.

[0003] Closest to the present invention is the DDW-H32-DDSR40-60[110] loss-in-weight feeder from Brabender Technologie KG. This device comprises a container for bulk material with a stirring apparatus and interchangeable screw profiles. A suitable twin screw feeder can be attached and used depending on the bulk material. The screws and the stirring apparatus are each driven by a separate motor.

[0004] A disadvantage with this apparatus is the change-over times incurred when the bulk material is changed. The parts in contact with the product, that is the container, the stirring apparatus and the screws must be cleaned. In the case of expensive bulk materials, cleaning is additionally also associated with costs since some of the bulk material is lost. The two motors make the device heavy which has an unfavourable effect on the measurement accuracy in a weighing system.

[0005] It is the object of the invention to provide a device for metering bulk material where only short changeover times are incurred and no bulk material is lost through the cleaning process.

[0006] The solution of the problem is reproduced in the characterising part of claim 1 with regard to its main features, and in the following claims with regard to further advantageous embodiments.

[0007] In the present invention, the metering unit is designed as an exchangeable unit. This unit comprises all components coming in contact with the bulk materials. These are substantially a container for the bulk material together with a stirring apparatus and a metering module for metering means such as screws for example. A motor unit with a single motor drives the stirring apparatus and the metering means. The stirring apparatus is constructed from a base rotor on which a lateral rotor and/or a bridge breaker can be placed. The base rotor and the lateral rotor are configured such that they move at a short distance from the base area and an area of the side wall of the container. The mounting of the base rotor is configured so that it does not stick to the bulk material.

[0008] The invention is explained in detail with reference to the figures.

[0009] In the figures:

- [0010] Fig. 1 is a view of a metering unit from above,
- [0011] Fig. 2 is a detailed view of the metering unit from below,
- [0012] Fig. 3 is a view of a base rotor,
- [0013] Fig. 4 is a view of a lateral rotor,
- [0014] Fig. 5 is a view of a bridge breaker,
- [0015] Fig. 6 is a view of a drive unit,
- [0016] Fig. 7 is a first view which illustrates the process of changing the metering unit,
- [0017] Fig. 8a, b show two further views which illustrate the process of changing the metering unit,
- [0018] Fig. 9 is a view of a device ready for operation.

[0019] Figure 1 shows a view from above of the metering unit 1 according to the invention for metering bulk material. The essential components are a container 3 for bulk material, a metering module 2 and a stirring apparatus 5. The metering module contains two screws 4; these are visible through a feed opening in the bottom of the container 3. The screws 4 are exchangeable and can be replaced by other screws. However, the metering module 2 can also have a single screw 4 or another metering means such as a conveyor belt, for example. The metering means are driven by means of a wheel 6. A gear 7 is additionally provided here between the screws 4 and the wheel 6 as shown in Fig. 1. However, the gear 7 can be omitted especially if only one metering means is provided in the metering module, for example, a single screw 4. In this simple case, the drive axis designated by the letter C can at the same time be the axis of rotation of the screw 4. The metering means of the metering module 2 convey the bulk material to an outlet 8.

[0020] A base rotor 11 comprising three blades 18 of the stirring apparatus 5 therewith continuously advances bulk material into the feed opening in the bottom of the container 3. In this case, the base rotor 11 in Fig. 1 is configured in the form of a three-bladed rotor. Naturally, a different number of blades or a different type of rotor, for example, a rotating net or braid, can also

be used. Non-circular movements are also possible according to the invention. However, it is important to the invention that the shape of the base rotor 11 is matched to the inside of the base area of the container 3 and moves at a distance of less than 1 mm from the base area. The short distance ensures small residual quantities of bulk material which saves costs, especially in the case of expensive bulk material. In order to achieve the effect of a blade sliding over a surface, the blades of the base rotor (11) are chamfered at the front in the direction of rotation.

[0021] The metering unit 1, as is also shown in Fig. 7, is designed as an exchangeable unit and is primarily used in metering units, loss-in-weight feeders, extruders or tabletting machines. For this purpose, the B axis by which means the stirring apparatus is driven, has an axial quick coupling unit 10 at one end, as shown in Fig. 2. When the axial quick coupling unit 10 is coupled on, the metering unit 1 can be swivelled about the B axis, as is illustrated in Figs. 8a, b. A machine equipped with metering units 1 is extremely suitable for producing mixtures of bulk material, for example, in a laboratory. A plurality of metering units 1 each contain a bulk material and are used in order in the machine. These machines can be fitted with a drive unit 24, for example, which is described further below and which advantageously cooperates with the metering unit 1. Figure 3 shows a view of a base rotor 11 obliquely from below. The central area of the base rotor 11 is formed by a cap 16. Running centrally through the cap 16 along the B axis is a hole 19 into which a shaft 15 fits, for example, and the base rotor 11 can be affixed thereon. In the lower visible portion the hole 19 is expanded so that when the shaft is inserted, an intermediate space is formed in this lower portion between the cap 16 and the shaft 15. When the base rotor 11 is attached for operation as shown in Fig. 1, and turns, bulk material can creep into this intermediate space, especially because of the short distance from the base area of the container 3. When the base rotor 11 turns in the directions of the arrows indicated in Figs. 1 and 3, the bulk material flows through a groove 17 provided in the lower portion of the cap 16 from the intermediate space back into the container 3. The groove 17 is arranged so that its inner end runs before the outer end in the direction of rotation of the base rotor 11 so that a direction of flow from inside to outside is predefined. The continuous flow of bulk material out from the intermediate space avoids bulk material becoming deposited on the shaft, sticking or adhering there and being able to block or damage the base rotor 11 with time.

[0022] Figure 4 shows a lateral rotor 12 comprising two blades 18 for example. The lateral rotor can be detachably attached, for example, using a screw through a hole 20 to the cap 16 of the base rotor. The blades 18 are each bent outwardly upwards or downwards with respect to a vertical axis of

rotation and chamfered at the front in the direction of rotation. The chamfered portions of the blades 18 are in turn substantially matched to the contour of wall areas of the container 3 or an additional container which can be placed thereon and rotate at a distance of less than 1 mm from the relevant wall area. Adhering bulk material can thereby be removed from this wall zone, for example, so that a small residual quantity can be ensured even with adhesive bulk material.

[0023] Figure 5 shows a bridge breaker 13. In the exemplary embodiment as shown in Fig. 5, this has eight bridge breaker rods 14. At its lower end, it has a pin 21, for example. The pin 21 passes, for example, through the hole 20 of a lateral rotor 12 into a thread of the cap 16 of the base rotor 11 and into an opening 22 of another bridge breaker 13. A bridge breaker has at least one bridge breaker rod 14 or a means fulfilling the same purpose. The spacing and the number of bridge breaker rods 14 must be varied according to the bulk material. This can be achieved, on the one hand, by placing a plurality of bridge breakers 13 one above the other at corresponding heights or by displaceable attachment of more or less bridge breaker rods 14 on one or more bridge breakers 13.

[0024] The combination of the base rotor 11 with one or more lateral rotors and/or bridge breakers 13 allows the construction of various stirring apparatus suitable or optimised for specific bulk material. For example, lateral rotors 12 and bridge breakers 13 can be attached in alternating sequence on a base rotor 11. Other sequences are naturally also possible according to the invention.

[0025] Naturally, other forms of blades 18 and bridge breaker rods 14 than those in the exemplary embodiments as shown in Figs. 4 and 5 are also possible according to the invention. For example, the blades can both be bent upwards or downwards, and also matched to a curved or sloping wall area of a container 3 or an additional funnel. Also the bridge breaker rods can be bent, for example, they can have transverse rods forming a rake or they can have any cross-section.

[0026] In another embodiment which is not shown, the blades 18 of the lateral rotor 12 can be configured so that they can be attached to the bridge breaker like the bridge breaker rods 14. Consequently, a bridge breaker thus configured then takes over the function of the lateral rotor at least in part.

[0027] Figure 6 shows a motor drive unit 24 which advantageously cooperates with an exchangeable metering unit 1 described previously and its stirring apparatus 5. The motor 25 drives an axle A. The axis B of the stirring apparatus 5 substantially parallel to the axis A is thus driven via a plurality of wheels 27. Naturally, the transmission of force from the A axis to the B axis can also

be achieved by other means known to the person skilled in the art, for example, using belts or chains. A shaft 28 rotating with the B axis in turn bears an axial quick coupling unit 29. This axial quick coupling unit 29 is the counterpart to the axial quick coupling unit 10 of the metering unit 1. The motor drive unit 24 and the metering unit 1 can be interconnected by means of the axial quick coupling units 10, 29 in such a manner that the metering unit 1 can be pivoted about the B axis. A bevel gear 26 is situated on the A axis driven by the motor 25 and this bevel gear drives a second bevel gear 26 located on an axis D substantially orthogonal to the A axis. A drive wheel 30 is also situated on the D axis. The metering means of the metering module 2 can be driven by means of the drive wheel 30 via the wheel 6. Consequently, only one motor 25 is provided for driving the stirring apparatus 5 and for the drive of the metering means. As a result, the weight of the drive unit 24 can be significantly reduced, enhancing the measurement accuracy of the weighing device.

[0028] Figure 7 shows the motor drive unit 24 from Fig. 6 in a housing 35. Figure 7 further shows that the metering unit 1 can be connected to the motor drive unit 24 by positioning its axial quick coupling unit 10 onto the axial quick coupling unit 29 of said motor drive unit. Numerous types of axial quick coupling units are known to the person skilled in the art for this type of connection. It is important for the invention that one component 10 is attached to the metering unit 1 and one component 29 to the motor drive unit 24.

[0029] Figures 8a, b show the metering unit 1 and the motor drive unit 24 from above after connecting the axial quick coupling units 10, 29. The metering unit 1 can now be pivoted about the B axis so that the C and D axes come to lie in positions substantially parallel to one another. As a result, the wheel 6 and the drive wheel 30 on the C and D axes come in non-positive contact whereby the motor 25 can also drive the metering means as has already been mentioned.

[0030] In a variant to the process of connecting the metering unit 1 to the motor unit 24 shown in Figs. 7, 8a and 8b, the housing 35 can be configured so that the metering unit 1 is inserted and coupled-in from above directly into the position shown in Fig. 8b. The turning movement shown in Figs. 8a and 8b can then be omitted. Figure 9 shows a device 40 ready for operation, comprising all the components according to the invention: the motor drive unit 24 is accommodated in the housing 35, the metering unit 1 for metering bulk material is inserted and the base rotor 11 is attached in the container 3. In this case, a plate 9 is connected to the housing 35 by means of a screw 36 so as to ensure a non-positive connection between the wheel 6 and the drive wheel 30. Naturally, instead of the screw 36, it is also possible to use a wing nut, a snap-fit closure, a magnet or another means

commonly known to the person skilled in the art. During operation, for example, in a laboratory, mixtures of bulk materials, for example, can now be produced easily. When a predetermined amount of a bulk material has been weighed out, the machine is preferably stopped and the connection between the plate 9 and the housing 35 is released. The metering unit 1 is then pivoted out from the housing 35 for example and the axial quick coupling units 10, 29 are separated from one another so that the metering unit 1 is released from the device 49 and can be placed aside. Another metering unit 1 containing another bulk material can then be connected in a similar manner to the device 40 and the mixing process can be continued. This process can naturally be carried out using any number of metering units 1. The change-over times are extremely short and the cleaning expenditure and associated loss of material and time are not incurred until the bulk material of a metering unit 1 needs to be exchanged.

[0031] Reference list

[0032] 1. Metering unit

[0033] 2. Container

[0034] 3. Metering module

[0035] 4. Screw

[0036] 5. Stirring apparatus

[0037] 6. Wheel

[0038] 7. Gear casing

[0039] 8. Outlet

[0040] 9. Front plate

[0041] 10. Quick coupling unit

[0042] 11. Base rotor

[0043] 12. Lateral rotor

[0044] 13. Bridge breaker

[0045] 14. Bridge breaker rod

[0046] 15. Shaft

[0047] 16. Cap

[0048] 17. Groove

[0049] 18. Blade

[0050] 19. Hole

[0051] 20. Hole

[0052] 21. Pin

[0053] 22. Opening

[0054] 24. Drive unit

[0055] 25. Motor

[0056] 26. Bevel gear

[0057] 27. Wheel

[0058] 28. Shaft

[0059] 29. Quick coupling unit

[0060] 30. Drive wheel

[0061] 35. Housing

[0062] 36. Screws

[0063] 40. Device

[0064] A. Axis

[0065] B. Axis

[0066] C. Drive axis

[0067] D. Axis